

# Screen time guidelines for kids may finally get a reality check

 [washingtonpost.com/news/parenting/wp/2015/10/06/screen-time-guidelines-for-kids-may-finally-get-a-reality-check/](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/parenting/wp/2015/10/06/screen-time-guidelines-for-kids-may-finally-get-a-reality-check/)

By Amy  
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My kids are and have been growing up in the age of the “no screen time for kids under age 2” recommendation by the American Academy of Pediatrics. We pretty much tried to abide by that. Well, except for those mornings when I was pregnant with #2 and so sick, I could barely gag through toasting a bagel for our then 2-year-old. Enter: PBS Kids. Oh, and then there was the phase when we were so exhausted with a newborn that we needed 30 minutes of a preoccupied toddler. “Sesame Street”! And, unfortunately, there was the mourning period through my mother’s sickness and death. You guessed it: it was 5:30 a.m., both kids were up, my husband and I were having those dull achy, sad and exhausted mornings so what harm is a little “Wildkrats”?

We didn’t overdo it. They spent their days outdoors, at museums, at the zoo, taking long walks and spending hours at the park. But as one wise editor and boss told me once: “You’re only hurting yourself if you ban screens.”

So we knew about the guidelines, but we were the parents. We did what we did when we did it because that’s how we rolled. Probably you, too.

In its October issue of AAP News, which I do look to for guidelines and so much incredible information, the authors of “[Beyond ‘Turn it off’: How to advise families on media use](#)” indicate it will change its screen time rules to keep up with the times — and with reality.

Today, more than 30 percent of U.S. children first play with a mobile device when they are still in diapers, the article reported from [Common Sense Media](#), an organization that studies and rates all things screens, technology and books for kids.

The AAP declared in 2011 that kids younger than 2 should have no screen time at all, and no more than two hours per day for kids older than that. But the AAP had a symposium this spring to discuss technology. The result? “In a world where screen time is becoming simply ‘time,’ our policies must evolve or become obsolete.” New guidelines are expected in 2016.

My kids are now in school and *need* screen time. Our younger son is in kindergarten and has his own passcode to play assigned math games on the computer at home. The third-grader in our house spends a lot of time on computers at school and needs it at home now for research, the same aforementioned math program and yes, for his own desire to check box scores. TV is limited, but they watch sports shows in the morning for about a half hour before school. They get movies on some Friday nights and are begging for a Nintendo Wii.

They are, like most kids, guided by their father and myself on all things sugar, eating, homework and, yes, screens. Would they like more TV and computer games if we let them? Of course. But there are limits that we set, mostly based on how zombie-ish they are looking (they turn into different children with too much screen time), what the weather is like or if we still need a little peace.

I admit that it’s a hard sea to navigate. I know they will be quiet at a restaurant if I hand over my phone, but I also know when I do that, we miss out on conversations like the recent ones about who’s strongest in kindergarten or

why the Earth turns but we don't get dizzy.

It's such a tough new world that the number of pitches I get on kids and screen time as the editor of this blog is overwhelming. Many of the pieces are spot on and tackling all the things that worry us about screen time: How do I teach my child to be [nice on social media](#)? How do we navigate this when we're the [first generation of parents](#) dealing with kids and screens? There are programs that [aim to teach us](#) about it. There are parents [who put no limits on screens](#), and others [who do](#), and others [who learned](#) they [needed limits](#) themselves. There are [studies](#) that studied it and [surveys where kids](#) tell us to stop being so distracted.

Our parents didn't have to deal with much wrangling over screen time. (That weekly episode of Little House on the Prairie was a family affair.) And many people argue that because we didn't spend our lives in front of screens, we were much better off. You know what else? We didn't have car seats and we drank Kool-Aid. Were we better off that way, too?

So. It will be interesting to hear what the AAP has to say. We certainly have a lot to say ourselves. As it should be.

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